

Red Sub Peril Held Rising At Fast Pace

Admiral's Speech
Urging Swift
Action Censored

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In its hearings to date, the Stennis Committee has effectively brought out the pros and cons of "muzzling" military officers on foreign policy, but another Pentagon censorship issue has been left untouched.

Not long ago a ranking Navy admiral submitted for Defense Department clearance a speech in which he planned to give warning of a danger which causes him great concern.

It stressed the prime importance of launching a major program immediately to counter the rapidly mounting Soviet missile submarine threat. A stepup in effort now could check the threat, he said, while delay may produce real trouble.

On objection of the Defense Department Comptroller's Office, he was told to tone down the speech. His views were said to conflict with official policy and the budget.

The facts indicate that there is much cause for the admiral's concern, although the issue is broader than this.

The Defense Department will not release such figures, but it can be stated authoritatively that U. S. intelligence estimates that the Soviet Union now has about 30 missile submarines, about 10 of them nuclear powered.

Not in Polaris Class

None are comparable with the six U. S. Polaris subs now in commission, which carry 16 1200-mile-range missiles that can be fired from below the sea. The Russian missile sub fleet includes both ballistic rocket craft and boats that carry air-breath-

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ing missiles like the 500-mile American Regulus subs.

They carry a maximum of three missiles each which have a maximum range of 350 miles, and must surface to fire. It is doubtful that they can match the Polaris' reliability and "invisibility" record to date.

The Polaris craft have had all 16 of their missiles ready to fire on 15 minutes notice 95 per cent of the time on station, and 15 out of 16 missiles ready 99.9 per cent of the time. As yet no Polaris has been detected, as far as the Navy can tell.

But the total U.S.S.R. missile sub fleet now is conceded to be bigger than was considered likely only a short time ago, and there is little doubt that the Red Navy is expending great effort to match the Polaris and further expand its undersea missile fleet.

How big an antisubmarine effort the United States should mount to meet this threat is a matter of dispute both within the Navy and the Defense Department.

Great strides have been made in submarine defense in recent years as a result of a gradually increased level of effort. The present ASW forces are equipped to make a good showing against the Russian forces today, although Navy chiefs cannot guarantee that the United States would not suffer serious casualties if the 30 Soviet missiles should launch an attack.

Some of the present shortcomings of the Russian subs are not as important as may seem. Their missiles do not need long range to blast American coastal cities, and while surface firing increases their chance of detection, the craft should be able to get their shots off first.

On the other hand, geography and America's world-wide allies present Russia with a more difficult submarine attack problem than that faced by U. S. Polaris craft. Overseas air bases and surveillance nets provide the means of detecting Red subs as they emerge from the straits and

narrow waters limiting Russian egress to the open sea.

Another aspect of the problem involves attacks on U. S. warships and supply vessels in limited war. During the Korean War, Red China had no submarines. Today, the Chinese Communist Navy has 25 to 30 Soviet-type subs. Moscow also has furnished submarines to Indonesia, Egypt and some to European satellites.

In case of another Korea, Soviet submarines could covertly attack U. S. ships with little fear of discovery.

No Soviet subs have been given to Cuba, although recently Soviet merchantmen have been towing patrol craft and subchasers to Cuba for delivery to Castro's navy.

The real threat of Communist submarine power, however, lies ahead, when Russia gets many nuclear-powered missile and torpedo attack subs. Much of the present American ASW defense, which can cope with conventional submarines, may then become obsolete.

ASW chiefs would like to see a greater development effort on nuclear-powered surface ships and planes, with the unlimited endurance to match the A-propelled subs. They also talk of the need of maintaining a permanent antisubmarine barrier force as well as a host of other costly development programs.

The decision as to how much money should be devoted to meeting the submarine threat is a complicated problem. Some Pentagon officials argue with much plausibility that only the Chief of Naval Operations or Secretary of Defense can properly conclude how much should be allocated for various Navy and overall defense needs so as to maintain balance armed forces.

But in the past, Congress and the people have insisted on settling vital arms questions that are disputed by the experts.

Past Defense chiefs have tried, without success, to "muzzle" the advocates of bigger bomber forces, greater air defense and larger armies.